

# HEPATITIS A

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

### **What is Hepatitis A?**

*Hepatitis A is swelling and tenderness of the liver resulting from inflammation caused by the Hepatitis A virus.*

### **How is it spread?**

Hepatitis A virus is transmitted from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. This type of transmission is called “fecal-oral.” The virus is more easily spread in areas where poor sanitary conditions exist or where good personal hygiene is not observed. Common source outbreaks have been related to contaminated water; food contaminated by infected food handlers; raw or undercooked shellfish harvested in contaminated waters; and contaminated produce such as lettuce and strawberries.

Symptoms may begin as early as 15 days or as long as 50 days after exposure. The average time from exposure to symptoms is about one month. Most people are contagious for two weeks before and for a few days to one week after symptoms begin.

### **How is it treated?**

Since there is no specific treatment for hepatitis A, supportive measures such as rest, change of diet and increased fluid intake are generally recommended. It is important that a person with suspected hepatitis A infection consult with their physician, who can confirm the diagnosis by obtaining a thorough patient history and performing certain hepatitis A lab tests. A physician can also make recommendations for post-exposure prophylaxis for close contacts of a confirmed hepatitis A case.

### **How can we prevent Hepatitis A?**

- Practice good personal hygiene by washing hands with soap and water prior to food preparation, before eating, after using the bathroom, or after diapering/toileting a small child.
- Close contacts to a hepatitis A case may receive either the hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (varies with age) within two weeks of exposure which may help prevent disease.
- Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for children 12-23 months of age and all others who are at risk of infection.
- Infected food handlers, child care staff or attendees should be excluded from work or attendance until they are no longer infectious to avoid transmitting the virus to others.

### **SYMPTOMS OF HEPATITIS A**

- Abdominal pain especially in the liver area
- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Dark urine
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

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